

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY ATHENS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1889

C O N F I D E N T I A L ATHENS 10150

EXDIS

FOR THE SECRETARY

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PDIP PINS GR US

SUBJECT: DEATH OF RICHARD S. WELCH - SOME PRELIMINARY COMMENTS

REF: ATHENS 10112, 10113 AND 10116

1. THE ASSASSINATION LAST NIGHT OF DICK WELCH HAS SENT A SHARP SHOCK WAVE THROUGH OUR EMBASSY AND THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY IN GREECE. AS OF LATE THIS MORNING DEC 24, WE STILL HAVE NO HARD INFORMATION AS TO WHO COMMITTED THIS TERRIBLE CRIME AND WHY.
2. THE GREEK GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN COOPERATIVE AND VIGOROUS IN INITIATING AN EXTENSIVE INVESTIGATION AND IS MAKING A MAJOR EFFORT TO APPREHEND THOSE RESPONSIBLE. IN ADDITION, SENIOR GREEK OFFICIALS HAVE INFORMED ME THAT ADDITIONAL SECURITY MEASURES HAVE BEEN UNDERTAKEN FOR THE PROTECTION OF US OFFICIALS IN GREECE.
3. DURING THE NIGHT I SPOKE REPEATEDLY BY TELEPHONE WITH MINISTER OF COORDINATION PAPALIGOURAS (THE SENIOR MINISTER IN ATHENS AT THE PRESENT TIME IN VIEW OF CARAMANLIS' ABSENCE IN CORFU), DEFENSE MINISTER AVEROFF AND FOREIGN MINISTER BITSIOS. AVEROFF ALSO PERSONALLY CAME TO THE EMBASSY DURING THE NIGHT ON INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO CONVEY OFFICIALLY THE REGRETS OF THE GREEK GOVERNMENT OVER THIS TRAGIC EVENT AND TO ASSURE ME
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THAT THE GREEK GOVERNMENT WAS TAKING ALL APPROPRIATE

ACTION TO GET TO THE BOTTOM OF IT. IN ADDITION, PRESIDENT TSATSOS ABRUPTLY TERMINATED AN OFFICIAL DINNER LAST NIGHT AND SENT HIS DIPLOMATIC COUNSELOR TO SEE ME TO CONVEY HIS PERSONAL AND OFFICIAL REGRETS. PRIME MINISTER CARAMANLIS ALSO PERSONALLY CALLED ME FROM CORFU EARLY THIS MORNING FOR THE SAME PURPOSE.

4. DESPITE THE SHOCK AND SADNESS WE ALL FEEL HERE OVER DICK'S DEATH, THE EMBASSY IS OF COURSE OPEN TODAY AND FUNCTIONING AS NORMALLY AS POSSIBLE ALTHOUGH I HAVE ORDERED THAT CERTAIN ADDITIONAL SECURITY MEASURES BE TAKEN. WE ARE ALSO FLYING THE FLAG AT HALF MAST FOR TODAY. WE HAVE RECEIVED INNUMERABLE CALLS AND VISITS FROM GREEKS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF OTHER GOVERNMENTS EXPRESSING THEIR SYMPATHY AND ABHORRENCE OVER THIS EVENT.

5. ALTHOUGH WE DO NOT AS YET HAVE ANY FIRM CLUES AS TO WHO THE PERPETRATORS OF THIS CRIME ARE OR WHY THEY DID IT, THE ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH WE OPERATE HERE CERTAINLY HAS PLAYED A PART. YOU ARE UNDOUBTEDLY AWARE THAT WE CONTINUE TO BE SUBJECT TO ATTACKS AND CRITICISM IN THE PRESS -- ALTHOUGH SOMEWHAT MORE MUTED NOW -- AND THERE HAS BEEN A RENEWED UPSURGE LATELY OF VIRULENT ANTI-CIA STORIES, BASED MOSTLY ON NEWS STORIES FILED FROM WASHINGTON. THIS WAS GIVEN A SPECIAL IMPETUS LAST MONTH WHEN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ATHENS NEWS PUBLISHED A LIST OF ALLEGED CIA OFFICIALS IN ATHENS (ATHENS 9252). DICK WELCH WAS NAMED AS THE CIA STATION CHIEF HERE IN THIS AND OTHER STORIES THAT FOLLOWED, WHICH ALSO GAVE HIS HOME ADDRESS. SOME PAPERS ALSO PRINTED PICTURES OF HIS RESIDENCE.

6. IN ADDITION TO THIS GENERAL ATMOSPHERE OF ANIMOSITY TOWARD THE CIA THERE ARE, OF COURSE, NUMEROUS GROUPS IN GREECE, INCLUDING GREEK CYPRIOT STUDENTS, REFUGEES AND OTHERS, WHO HAVE PARTICULARLY STRONG FEELINGS ABOUT THE ALLEGED ACTIVITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CIA IN CONNECTION WITH THE JUNTA AND THE SUBSEQUENT CYPRUS TRAGEDY. IT IS TOO EARLY TO SAY WHETHER THE ASSASSINS CAME FROM THESE OR ANY OTHER GREEK CYPRIOT OR GREEK
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GROUP OF EITHER EXTREME. HOPEFULLY THE INVESTIGATION BEING CONDUCTED BY THE GREEK POLICE AUTHORITIES WILL REVEAL THE IDENTITY OF THOSE RESPONSIBLE QUICKLY. I INTEND TO SEE THAT THEY SPARE NO EFFORT.

7. BY SEPTELS WE ARE REPORTING GREEK PRESS REACTION TO THE ASSASSINATION AND INFORMATION REGARDING THE FAMILY'S DESIRES FOR RETURNING THE

REMAINS TO THE US INCLUDING FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS.
MRS. WELCH HAS REMAINED IN HER RESIDENCE AND IS
BEARING UP EXTRAORDINARILY WELL UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES
AND WITH CONSIDERABLE COURAGE. DICK'S SEVENTY-FIVE
YEAR OLD FATHER, COLONEL PATRICK WELCH, IS ALSO
BEARING UP RELATIVELY WELL. MR. WELCH'S THREE
CHILDREN, WHO ARE AT PRESENT IN ENGLAND, HAVE ALREADY
BEEN NOTIFIED OF THEIR FATHER'S DEATH.
KUBISCH

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